

Five-year plan in works to boost after-school child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Japan will draft a five-year plan with numerical targets to increase the capacity of after-school child care centers nationwide so more women with young children can work, it was learned Monday.

The Cabinet will set a timetable for the measures to be taken by the central and local governments that starts in fiscal 2015. The details, such as the numerical targets, will be set as early as June, informed sources said.

Municipalities and nonprofit organizations run after-school child care centers but demand is rising along with the increase in working couples. As of May 1, 2013, there were a record high 21,500 such child care centers across Japan managing about 889,200 children, the highest on record. Due to capacity shortages, however, 8,700 children were on waiting lists.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is trying to get more women into the workforce to help revitalize the economy, and bolstering capacity at after-school care centers is seen as a step toward achieving this.

The central government will set a five-year target for registered children after researching demand for child care services. It will then draw up the measures, including financial support.

In Japan, many mothers give up work when their children leave nursery and enter elementary school, since many after-school services don't run as late as nurseries, which provide extended care into the evening. The central government will discuss measures to tackle this issue as well.

Currently, 62 percent of all after-school care centers operate after 6 p.m.

As of fiscal 2014, the central government has been providing ¥1.56 million in subsidies to each after-school center that offers services lasting past 6:30 p.m.

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